



Higher Education Review of Liverpool Hope University

December 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Liverpool Hope University. The review took place from 30 November to 3 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Anthony Bagshaw
- Ms Barbara Howell
- Mr Mark Langley
- Mrs Sarah d'Ambrumenil (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Liverpool Hope University and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about higher education provision
 - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) is found on page 5 followed by numbered paragraphs starting on page 6.

In reviewing Liverpool Hope University, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Liverpool Hope University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Liverpool Hope University.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Liverpool Hope University.

- The early and considered engagement with internal and external stakeholders during the design and approval of programmes (Expectation B1).
- The University's strategic, comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting staff development to enhance learning and teaching practices (Expectations B3 and Enhancement).
- The effective integration of student support services within the academic provision to enhance students' engagement with their studies (Expectation B4).
- The Communities of Practice, which provide an effective platform for identifying, developing and sharing good practice to enhance learning and teaching (Expectations B3 and Enhancement).
- The significant emphasis on development and improvement within the annual review and enhancement process, which informs the University's strategy and priorities for enhancement (Expectations B8 and Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Liverpool Hope University.

By June 2016:

- develop a clearly defined process for the conversion of study abroad grades (Expectations A3.2 and B6)
- ensure clarity and consistency in the policy for the accreditation of prior learning (Expectations B6 and C)
- ensure the appropriate evaluation of the physical resource needs of individual postgraduate research students (Expectation B11).

By September 2016:

- ensure the regular and timely review of terms of reference for all committees within the academic governance and management framework (Expectation A2.1).

Theme: Student Employability

Liverpool Hope University (the University) recognises employability as an essential component of the student experience, realised through a series of policies and initiatives to enable its graduates to succeed in a competitive global labour market. Students are provided with a high level of support and advice on careers, employability and business start-ups from many complementary sources across the University. The current focus is on embedding employability skills within the curriculum and encouraging students to undertake volunteering opportunities. The success of the University's initiatives in this area is supported by improvements in the results of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review](#).

About Liverpool Hope University

Liverpool Hope University is an ecumenical Christian foundation that traces its origins back to the mid-19th century. It gained taught degree awarding powers in 2002, followed by official university title in 2005 and research degree awarding powers in 2009.

The University's faith-based mission and values are underpinned by its underlying philosophy of the Collegium - 'an academic community of scholars providing a nurturing environment to stimulate and foster the scholarly advancement of all its students, working with and through them to create participants in learning (rather than recipients of learning) and to engender personalised learning (rather than mass teaching)'.

The University has some 3,959 undergraduate students, 585 postgraduate taught students and approximately 140 postgraduate research students who are studying towards a postgraduate research degree either through the University or one of three collaborative partners. The University's primary base is Hope Park situated in a suburb of Liverpool, with a city centre campus for creative and performance arts subjects.

The University continues to deliver its undergraduate programmes through the Network of Hope - a partnership with two faith-based sixth-form colleges in the region, accounting for around 430 students. It has also established new partnerships to deliver its postgraduate research awards through a private institution and two public universities, with a long-term view to supporting these public universities in gaining their own research degree awarding powers.

While there has been continuity in the senior leadership of the University since the last QAA review in 2009, a number of developments have taken place. These include a refocusing of academic subjects to align more closely with the University's strategic intention to move forward as a liberal arts-inspired institution. A major review of all its provision also resulted in the University moving from a modular framework to an integrated curriculum for its undergraduate provision, with each level of undergraduate study comprising two 60-credit blocks. These changes have been accompanied by the restructuring of academic departments, including the merging of two faculties to rationalise provision in the subject area of sciences. The University's committee structure has also been refined and developed further to ensure that it continues to remain fit for purpose in the context of its strategic direction.

Since the last review, a number of new posts have been created including the Dean of Students to provide oversight of the overall student learning experience; a Senior Academic Quality Adviser to maintain central oversight and implementation of the University's academic quality framework; faculty executive officers to ensure close alignment of

faculty-based activities with University requirements for quality assurance; and a Director of Learning and Teaching Development to promote enhancement through a coordinated approach to staff development. There has also been significant investment in physical resources with work underway to build a new specialist centre to support the development of lab-based science provision.

While the University does not have plans to significantly grow its student population, it recognises the challenge it faces in recruiting students while continuing to raise its entry standards. The commitment to the ethos of a Collegium has involved the University taking a strategic decision to resist pressure to outsource or share any of its services. While this has financial implications, the University is in good financial health and considers its ability to remain an autonomous ecumenical institution a key priority and challenge for the future. The University, like many other institutions in the sector, has seen a reduction in the size of its initial teacher training provision as result of changes to allocation models at a national level. However, the University has been successful in bidding for additional places for the current and next academic year. The Corporate Plan ensures the University is able to respond effectively to these challenges in the wider context of changes within the sector.

The University's previous review resulted in a judgement of 'confidence' in the management of the academic standards of its awards and in the management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students at its home campuses and through the Network of Hope. There was a judgement of 'limited confidence' in the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the management of the quality of learning opportunities through its collaborative provision, aside from the Network of Hope. The previous review team made 14 recommendations and identified six features of good practice. In response to the outcome of the review, the University developed and implemented a comprehensive action plan to address the areas requiring improvement. The action plan was monitored through a mid-cycle follow-up by QAA in 2012 which found that good progress was being made in addressing the recommendations.

The University undertook a thorough review of all its collaborative provision, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of collaborative partners with which it works. There has also been a change in strategy towards collaborative provision and the general approach appears to be one of engaging in low-risk models with similar faith-based institutions. As a result, the University currently neither franchises nor validates its taught awards to a partner organisation.

Processes for establishing new partnerships and managing existing ones have been revised and strengthened. There are now clear processes in place to ensure all partnerships are underpinned by a valid legal agreement. A comprehensive handbook has been developed, with close reference to the Quality Code, to provide an academic framework for managing all aspects of collaborative provision. There is also better oversight through greater involvement of the Rectorate Team in the approval of new arrangements. A Collaborative Provision Sub-Group of the Academic Committee was established in 2012 to provide quality assurance across all partnerships. Recommendations relating to other areas have also been addressed and are dealt with under the relevant sections of this report. In summary, the present review team is satisfied that the University has responded appropriately to the outcome of the last review and that all recommendations have now been addressed in full.

Explanation of the findings about Liverpool Hope University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.1 The University ensures that the requirements of the FHEQ and consideration of other external reference points are explicitly embedded in the setting and maintenance of academic standards through standardised processes for programme design, approval and review. These processes are set out in considerable detail in handbooks made available to staff.

1.2 The University's Framework of Qualifications describes the levels of study and volume of credit for the different types of awards. All nationally recognised qualifications are expected to align to Levels 4 to 8 of the FHEQ, although the University has chosen to retain the previous QAA lettering system for levels. Programme specifications are required to specify the level of study. There is also published guidance to staff on naming qualifications in alignment with the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ.

1.3 The team reviewed the operation and effectiveness of these processes by scrutinising the Programme Design and Approval Handbook, approval and departmental review documentation, minutes of Academic Committee and Senate, definitive programme documentation, and external examiner reports. The team also met a range of senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.4 Programme specifications provide the definitive record for a particular award. This documentation is developed during programme design and submitted for consideration

as part of the approval process. A sample of specifications reviewed by the team confirm that there is explicit reference to the FHEQ level and evidence of appropriate engagement with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics, and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. There is also evidence of robust scrutiny of new programme proposals to check that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level. In particular, the external member of the approval panel is required to provide written confirmation that the learning outcomes of the award align to the relevant level of the FHEQ. External examiner reports provide confirmation of ongoing alignment with external reference points to maintain the academic standards of awards.

1.5 Staff whom the review team met were fully aware of external reference points and their use in the design and delivery of programmes. Programme specifications, handbooks and wider assessment descriptors inform students about the FHEQ and other relevant reference points. Students whom the team met confirmed their understanding of the level of study and the relationship their programmes have with professional and accrediting bodies.

1.6 The review team concludes that the University, through its clearly articulated programme approval processes, ensures that academic standards are secured at the appropriate level and with external oversight. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated risk level is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.7 For each type of award the University offers there are comprehensive programme regulations that stipulate the criteria for the award of the qualification, requirements for progression within the programme, and the basis on which student achievement is differentiated within the qualification. There is also an overarching set of assessment regulations which set out the processes by which assessment is managed and academic credit is awarded. Together these regulations provide a robust academic framework for securing threshold academic standards.

1.8 The authority and responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards rests with Senate. For operational purposes, responsibility for academic standards is delegated to the Academic Committee, and oversight of the student learning experience is through the Learning and Teaching Committee. Academic standards of research degrees are assured through the Research Degrees Committee (a standing committee of Senate) although operational responsibility lies with the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. This top-level structure is linked to individual faculties through faculty boards that are responsible for quality within their academic unit. Within each faculty there are also quality, learning and teaching committees, and research committees which report to both the relevant faculty board and subcommittee of Senate. This comprehensive committee structure provides an appropriate governance framework for assuring academic standards.

1.9 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the University's frameworks and regulations through a review of the terms of reference and a sample of minutes of the key committees. The team also explored the processes for the review and updating of terms of reference and academic regulations through discussions with senior University and faculty staff.

1.10 The University has appropriate governance arrangements to ensure that its academic regulations are applied systematically and consistently. Faculty Executive Officers located within faculties ensure that staff adhere to University expectations and processes for programme approval and review. Minutes of meetings confirm that quality assurance processes are implemented consistently and that there is appropriate oversight at both faculty and University level.

1.11 The University has a fully discursive committee structure in place which enables an appropriate level of oversight while encouraging faculties to take ownership of their academic provision. Minutes of the three standing committees of Senate confirm that there is appropriate monitoring of quality assurance activities within faculties. In the autumn of each year there is a joint meeting of the University's Academic Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee. This supports the holistic consideration of key themes arising from the annual review and enhancement process and external examiner reports.

1.12 The Registrar is a senior officer of the University and responsible for the initial drafting of regulations, as well as ensuring that they are kept up to date and aligned with existing provision. The Academic Committee is responsible for the review of all academic

regulations, with any changes proposed to Senate for ratification. Minutes of the Academic Committee confirm that this process operates effectively in practice.

1.13 Processes for reviewing and updating terms of reference of committees within the academic governance framework are less rigid. The team was informed that general practice is to review the terms of reference at the first meeting of each academic year, with any changes reported to Senate for approval. However, minutes of the Collaborative Provision Sub-Group (a subcommittee of the Academic Committee) indicate that a review was undertaken after two years. The terms of reference for faculty boards had only just been reviewed at the time of the visit, for the first time since 2011. While the team is satisfied that, in practice, committees operate effectively and report as intended, a more clearly defined cycle of review would ensure that terms of reference accurately reflect current responsibilities. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by September 2016 the University ensures the regular and timely review of terms of reference for all committees within the academic governance and management framework.

1.14 The team considers that the University has effective structures in place to secure academic standards across its portfolio of academic provision. The single recommendation in this area relates to the need to update terms of reference on a more regular basis and poses a low risk. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.15 Information about each programme of study and qualification is set out in a programme specification, which constitutes the definitive reference point for the delivery and assessment of the award. Programme specifications are developed during the approval process and signed off by the Chair of the approval panel. Specifications are also used as a reference point in the annual review of programmes and inform the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) issued to students on completion of their studies. The final version of definitive documentation is held centrally to ensure version control. Modifications to approved provision are managed in accordance with prescribed procedures set out in the Making Modifications to Approved Provision (MMAV) process.

1.16 The review team considered a sample of programme specifications across the University's provision, approval and modification documentation and redacted student transcripts. The team also met staff and students.

1.17 Programme specifications are clear, comprehensive and readily available through the University website. The content of programme specifications is subject to thorough scrutiny during the approval process and formally signed off prior to the first delivery of the programme. Specifications set out how programmes align with the UK credit framework and discuss how programme content, structure and assessment strategies provide students with opportunities for learning and assessment. Documentation reflects the relationship between the programme and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements. Changes to programmes are handled in accordance with the University's processes for minor and major modifications and the Faculty Executive Officer ensures any changes are reflected in programme specifications.

1.18 Course handbooks, which draw on information contained within specifications, are the main source of information for students on learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Students whom the team met confirmed that they have access to accurate and reliable information about their programme of study. On completion of their studies, students are issued with detailed transcripts that align to the relevant programme specification.

1.19 The team concludes that the University has effective processes for developing, approving and reviewing definitive programme documentation. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.20 Processes for the approval of new provision are laid out in a clear and comprehensive handbook readily available through the University website. There is a multi-stage programme approval process which sets clear expectations for engagement with internal stakeholders, and external academic and professional reference points. Following approval of an initial proposal by Senate (on the recommendation of the Academic Committee), draft programme documentation is first scrutinised internally through the Critical Friend Review. This allows the programme to be refined before submission to a formal approval panel, which includes external and student representatives. Any recommendations or conditions for approval arising from the validation event must be addressed prior to the first delivery of the programme.

1.21 All programme approvals are coordinated by the relevant Faculty Executive Officer with support from the University's Senior Academic Quality Adviser. At a local level, proposals for new programmes are overseen by faculty boards and the outcomes of all approval events are reported to the Academic Committee. Senate receives recommendations for approval and provides final sign-off for all new programmes.

1.22 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the University's processes for programme approval through consideration of handbooks and guidance documentation available to those involved in the process, records of Critical Friend reviews, programme approval reports, and minutes of faculty boards, Academic Committee and Senate. The team also met a range of staff who have been involved in proposing a new programme and those who have been part of an approval panel.

1.23 The criteria for approving a new programme make explicit the requirement to meet both internal and external reference points. Approval panels are required to satisfy themselves that academic standards are set at the appropriate FHEQ level, and that they reflect Subject Benchmark Statements and the University's framework and regulations. A review of definitive documentation submitted to approval panels confirms that there is appropriate mapping to relevant external reference points. Reports of approval events and documentation completed by the external panel member provide assurance that there is thorough scrutiny of the academic standards of new programmes. There is also evidence that any conditions for approval are addressed promptly and in full. Minutes of the Academic Committee and Senate confirm that there is strategic oversight of the outcomes of programme approvals.

1.24 Thorough guidance is available to all stakeholders involved in the approval of new provision. Staff whom the team met were clear about the role of programme approval in ensuring that academic standards are set at the appropriate level and that they align with national expectations. Staff confirmed that discussions around the alignment of learning outcomes to the FHEQ feature early on in the approval process. Staff are encouraged to shadow approval events before leading a programme through approval themselves. Further support is also available from quality staff based centrally and within the faculties.

1.25 The review team concludes that the University's processes for programme approval provide assurance that the academic standards of new awards are set at the appropriate level and take account of external reference points. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.26 The University ensures the attainment of relevant learning outcomes and UK threshold standards through its programme approval, assessment and review processes. Throughout, the University draws on external opinion and maps learning outcomes to the appropriate FHEQ level. The Standing Sub-Committee on Assessment (SSCA) maintains oversight of assessment regulations and frameworks and makes recommendations to the Academic Committee and Senate about any necessary modifications identified by external examiners or through internal monitoring.

1.27 There is an approved assessment framework for each programme and this is implemented in accordance with the University's Assessment of Student Regulations. Decisions to award credit are made on the basis of predefined assessment descriptors and subject to internal and external moderation processes. For research degrees, the oral examination and thesis test the attainment of the learning outcomes. For study abroad arrangements, where students undertake a part of their degree programme abroad, a learning agreement must be put in place to approve and confirm the learning outcomes and credit that will be achieved through such an arrangement.

1.28 To test the Expectation the team considered the programme approval process, definitive programme documentation, and assessment regulations and policies. Through terms of reference and minutes, the team considered the function and effectiveness of the SSCA. The team also spoke to a range of staff and students.

1.29 Programme specification templates require staff to articulate how students must demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes through assessment. The approval process draws on detailed internal and external commentary. For example, following outline approval, a Critical Friend Review scrutinises the draft programme, providing further assurance about the programme's coherence and appropriateness of assessment methods and criteria. The programme progresses through the final approval process with external academic adviser commentary. Definitive programme documentation and handbooks confirm the effectiveness of this process. Students the team met, both on campus and those from collaborative partners, confirmed that handbooks and assignment briefs detail learning outcomes clearly.

1.30 The processes of assessment and examination are secure in their support of learning outcomes. External examiners confirm that programme standards align with national expectations. An additional layer of faculty examiners comment on the integrity of examination processes and the running of progression and award boards. The University subsequently tracks any resulting action plans through annual review and its committee structures.

1.31 The University operates rigorous processes for ensuring curriculum mapping for study abroad arrangements. However, the processes for importing grades and credits for individual blocks of study completed abroad into the University's award are less clear. For example, in North America where study may be expressed in hours, staff have the discretion to approximate each hour to four or five credits. The University's policy for grade conversion is to take the mark awarded by the overseas institution and treat it as though it had been awarded at Liverpool Hope. Where the overseas institution has awarded a letter grade, the University converts this to a numerical value within a five-point band to produce the required percentage grade. It was unclear to the team how the decision to award a particular mark within the five-point scale would be made given that University staff would not have been involved in the assessment process. Students the team met also expressed some confusion about how the University imports marks awarded by international partners into their degree. While the team is satisfied that the processes for approving study abroad arrangements are robust, and that the discretion applied by University staff in the conversion of credits and grades does not impact on the overall standard of an award, staff and students would benefit from a more precise process for converting grades. This is particularly relevant given that the University has plans to expand this part of its provision further. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by June 2016 the University develops a clearly defined process for the conversion of study abroad grades.

1.32 Overall, the University has sound processes for ensuring that the award of credit is made on the achievement of defined learning outcomes and in accordance with its assessment regulations. In the view of the team, the issue surrounding the conversion of grades achieved through study abroad arrangements does not impact on the security of threshold academic standards, but greater clarity in this area would benefit both staff and students. Therefore, the review team concludes the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.33 Programmes are reviewed annually, and periodically on a five-yearly cycle, at departmental level. Through the annual review and enhancement process, programme teams are expected to reflect on curriculum content, the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, feedback from students and external examiners, the appropriateness of learning resources and student achievement. There is also an expectation for separate consideration to be given to provision delivered through partners, where applicable. Annual review culminates in the development of an action plan to address identified areas in the following academic year. Themes are summarised at department and faculty level and fed up through the committee structure.

1.34 The University's departmental review process also serves as a periodic review of all programmes within a particular department. This review is intended to serve both as a check on the operation of the department as a whole and the ongoing validity of individual programmes of study. The process for departmental review is set out in detail in a handbook and requires the submission of a comprehensive self-evaluation document by the academic unit undergoing review. For taught programmes, the review is expected to confirm that awards are delivered in accordance with University regulations and that academic standards are being maintained. The review involves scrutiny by a review panel, which includes external representatives, and results in a written report which is required to state explicitly whether the department, and its academic portfolio of provision, is functioning in line with University and external reference points. In exceptional cases the reapproval of a programme or suite of programmes may occur outside of the departmental review process. In either case, all programmes are subject to a periodic review every five years.

1.35 The review team tested the effectiveness of processes for programme review through consideration of a sample of annual review and enhancement reports, departmental self-evaluation documents and panel reports, and minutes of faculty and University committees. The team also met senior and teaching staff involved in the review of programmes.

1.36 While the annual review process is enhancement-focused, it also provides adequate assurance that academic standards are being maintained. Annual review and enhancement reports draw on a wide range of information, including assessment and student achievement data. External examiners are required to comment on the arrangements in place for the maintenance of academic standards, alignment to the FHEQ, assessment and the overall management of the programme as part of their annual report. These reports are considered in detail as part of the annual review process and provide the main basis for the assurance of academic standards.

1.37 Departmental review is also thorough in its evaluation of the academic standards of awards. Documents submitted by departments and panel reports provide evidence that consideration is given to the alignment of programmes with both internal and external reference points. Review panels include at least two external members and a student representative to ensure objectivity in the process.

1.38 Oversight of the annual review and enhancement process is the joint responsibility of the Academic Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee. Action plans arising from annual and periodic review processes are monitored at a local level through faculty management structures.

1.39 The review team concludes that through its annual and quinquennial departmental review processes, the University has sound arrangements for ensuring the maintenance of academic standards. Therefore the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.40 The University embeds externality in all relevant procedures and protocols at programme, faculty and institutional level. This is apparent in programme design, assessment and review.

1.41 During programme design and approval, staff are expected to draw on contributions from local businesses, professional networks and subject experts. A Critical Friend Review is intended to provide additional scrutiny of programme design and associated documentation following initial outline approval. At the final programme approval stage, external independent, subject-specific advisers comment on the programme and explicitly on how it reflects the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements. The University holds a combined approval event for programmes that require PSRB accreditation, such as awards in psychology and social work and those leading to Qualified Teacher Status.

1.42 External examiners are required to make explicit comment on the alignment of programmes to external reference points and on the validity and reliability of assessment. Faculty external examiners provide an overview of all programmes within their faculty and comment on the integrity of the examination process. The Standing Sub-Committee on Assessment has institutional oversight for all assessment activity and now invites faculty external examiners to comment on amended assessment regulations. External panel members on periodic review panels consider the departmental portfolio of provision. The process considers how programmes correspond with the FHEQ and wider reference points.

1.43 In testing the University's approach to meeting this Expectation, the team considered a range of programme approval, external examiner and critical review documentation. It considered the process for annual and departmental review and committee minutes, and discussed these with staff and students.

1.44 The University embeds externality at all levels of its quality processes, from programme design and approval through to assessment and review. Staff are clear about the range of external involvement in programme design, assessment and monitoring. For example, programme design templates require teams to provide external professional endorsement for programmes at outline planning stage. There is also evidence of thorough engagement with external opinion during the formal stages of programme approval and departmental review. Students the team met also confirmed that departmental review is comprehensive, objective and informed by the student voice.

1.45 Appropriate use is also made of external examiners in setting and maintaining academic standards. The dialogue with examiners about assessment activities confirms that external opinion is sought at all stages of delivery. External examiners are involved in decisions on awards for taught programmes and research degrees. Comments made in

external examiner reports are exacting and the annual review and enhancement process responds fully to feedback provided by examiners.

1.46 The University has clear and thorough processes for engaging with a range of external stakeholders in the setting and delivery of academic standards, and therefore the Expectation is met. The detail with which the University engages with external expertise ensures that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.47 In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.48 All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is low in each case. The review team identifies two areas for improvement: these relate to the need to ensure that terms of reference are updated regularly (Expectation A2.1) and that there is greater clarity in the process for importing grades achieved through study abroad arrangements (Expectation A3.2). Both of these recommendations relate to the need to update documentation and develop clearer processes, and therefore in the team's view do not individually or collectively pose a serious risk to this area. The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Findings

2.1 The University's processes for programme approval are described in paragraphs 1.20 and 1.21. Programme design is considered during the development of an initial proposal and is an integral part of the outline approval stage. The output from the design process is the definitive documentation presented to approval panels, which articulates the structure, content, and learning, teaching and assessment strategies for the proposed programme of study.

2.2 In testing the University's approach to meeting this Expectation, the review team analysed a sample of definitive documentation presented for approval, records of recent programme approvals and minutes of relevant committee meetings. The team also met staff and spoke to employers who had been involved in programme design and approval.

2.3 All new programmes must be proposed through the completion of a standard proposal form and have the support of the relevant Dean. Initial proposals are scrutinised on the basis of the academic rationale, demand for the provision, and resource requirements. This initial scrutiny ensures that only those programmes that are economically and academically viable are progressed through the formal approval process.

2.4 The University's programme approval process is comprehensive and ensures appropriate consideration is given to both the academic standards of the award and the quality of learning opportunities. In particular, there is a good level of engagement with both internal and external stakeholders throughout the process. The first stage of the approval process involves a review of the programme by a Critical Friend. This provides the proposing team with helpful objective feedback delivered using a standard form, and allows the proposal to be developed further prior to formal approval. The engagement of external stakeholders is also an important part of the process. Externals, including employers, are engaged early on in the development process and at defined points during approval. Initial proposals must demonstrate engagement with external bodies, and the team heard of one particular example where the University engaged in a year-long dialogue with the employment sector prior to proposing a new programme. All approval panels must include an external expert who is also required to provide independent written feedback on the proposal, confirming whether it meets University criteria. Students are now also included as representatives on the approval panel. The early and considered engagement with internal and external stakeholders during the design and approval of programmes is **good practice**.

2.5 Staff whom the team met confirmed that they have access to appropriate guidance, support and staff development to enable them to participate in programme design and approval. Detailed guidance is also provided to panel members so that they are fully apprised of their role.

2.6 A review of the documentary evidence for programme approvals confirms that the University adheres to its own process and that these are implemented consistently across

the three faculties. Senate retains oversight of the approval of all new programmes. It also assures itself of the effectiveness of the process through an annual audit of all approval events that have taken place in that academic year.

2.7 The review team concludes that the University operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of its programmes. In particular, the involvement of internal and external stakeholders makes a positive contribution to this area. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

Findings

2.8 The University's strategic plans for recruitment and admissions are outlined in its Corporate Plan and the annually reviewed Recruitment and Admissions Policy. The University's long-term strategy is to build a 70:30 ratio of undergraduate students to taught postgraduate students, to enable a more collegiate experience. Recruitment targets are set annually and entry requirements have risen in the last few years.

2.9 Programmes are advertised to applicants through UCAS, the website, prospectuses and subject-specific guides. Information about the admissions process is captured in applicant information made available through the website. A complaints and appeals process is publicly available and provided explicitly to unsuccessful applicants.

2.10 Applications for taught programmes are assessed against predefined entry criteria by staff based in the central admissions department, with the involvement of academic staff as appropriate. For the two partner colleges that are part of the Network of Hope, recruitment and selection is managed locally by the partner in accordance with approved entry criteria. Postgraduate research students apply through an online portal and all applications are initially considered by the faculty or partner organisation. Applicants who meet the entry criteria and whose outline proposal meets the requirements are considered by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee for final approval. All applicants whose first language is not English are required to have a suitable English language qualification.

2.11 The University informs applicants at the earliest opportunity of significant changes to, or withdrawal of, a programme. Applicants are given the opportunity to accept an offer on an alternative programme or to withdraw their application.

2.12 The team tested the effectiveness of the admissions process through a review of the Recruitment and Admissions Policy, material available to prospective applicants, evidence of consideration of applications and the review process following the admissions cycle. This evidence base was tested and triangulated in meetings with academic and professional services staff and students, including those from partner organisations.

2.13 Clear and comprehensive information about the University and individual programmes of study is made available to prospective applicants through the website. This is supplemented by open days and applicant days, where prospective applicants have the opportunity to meet current students and staff. Students whom the team met confirmed that they had access to appropriate information to enable them to make an informed choice, and that in most cases the actual experience either met or exceeded their expectations. Students are encouraged to declare any disability early on in the admissions process so that a one-to-one session with a Disability Support Adviser can be arranged. This ensures that the programme of study meets the student's needs, and that reasonable adjustments can be made.

2.14 Staff who are involved in the admissions process are appropriately qualified and experienced. Support and academic staff acting as admissions tutors are provided with initial

training followed by refresher information on a regular basis. Senior managers ensure that all staff members are aware of any policy changes that may affect admissions practice. Staff whom the team met were fully aware of their respective responsibilities for recruitment and admissions.

2.15 Appropriate arrangements exist for the evaluation and enhancement of the admissions process. The Recruitment and Admissions Policy is reviewed annually, with any amendments approved by Senate. The most recent review of the Policy focused on closer alignment with the Quality Code. Open days are evaluated with a written report provided to the Rectorate Team with a view to making improvements for the following academic year.

2.16 The review team concludes that the University has clear, comprehensive and easily accessible policies for managing admissions. These policies are implemented in practice to ensure those students that are capable of achieving their intended programme of study are selected. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.17 The University's overarching approach to learning and teaching is articulated in its Corporate Plan and underpinned by 10 broad principles that set out its vision of the Collegium. The concept of the Collegium promotes the idea of a scholastic community that nurtures student development. The aim is to offer a distinctive student experience within research-active departments, staffed by high-quality academics and skilled professionals, and through small tutorial groups and class sizes.

2.18 There is a comprehensive committee structure in place to support the delivery and systematic review of learning and teaching. Senate takes ultimate responsibility for the assurance and enhancement of all provision, including for the quality of student learning opportunities. On behalf of Senate, the Learning and Teaching Committee oversees the implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy for all taught provision. For postgraduate research programmes, the Research Degrees Sub-Committee and Research Committee provide the same assurance. Individual faculties take forward developments through faculty quality, learning and teaching subcommittees. Students sit on key committees and other stakeholders, such as employers and partner organisations, contribute to the University's approach to learning and teaching.

2.19 In its pursuit of academic and research excellence, the University has refined its criteria for recruiting new academic staff and invested in the development of existing staff. The expectation is for all staff to engage in scholarship and participate in appropriate staff development activities. A newly appointed Director of Learning and Teaching is responsible for ensuring a coherent and coordinated approach to staff development and the enhancement of University-wide learning and teaching.

2.20 The review team considered minutes of University and faculty committees, key strategies for learning and teaching, and reports from monitoring and review processes. The team also met with a wide range of staff and students.

2.21 The University's approach to learning and teaching is considered and multi-layered. A sound committee structure and a defined Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy enable the University to engender and maintain a consultative and enhancement-focused approach to this area. Academic and professional staff confirm that the Strategy's 10 principles underpinning learning, teaching and assessment arose from a reflective consultation process. Progress against the Strategy is systematically reviewed at every meeting of the University's Learning and Teaching Committee.

2.22 The University uses the information received through the committee structure to inform resourcing, delivery, staff development and enhancement initiatives. The Estates Strategy supports the University's sense of holistic learning by providing a long-term sustainable model, resulting in the recent £50 million investment in buildings and equipment. The University reviews its technical services annually, ensuring they support learning. The Dean of Students manages the Learning and Teaching Development Fund to provide further support for initiatives that foster and enhance learning opportunities.

2.23 The Dean of Students also promotes University-wide good practice in learning and teaching through the Communities of Practice. These involve collaborative partners, students, and academic and professional staff. The recently established post of a Director of Learning and Teaching Development is instrumental in pursuing these initiatives, and staff confirm this work is integral to the Collegium ethos. Students are less clear about the idea of a Collegium, but they are highly articulate about the sense of community and support they experience throughout their studies. It is clear that the Communities of Practice enable all participants to share ideas, identify issues and find solutions (see good practice under Enhancement).

2.24 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy outlines University staffing priorities and a commitment to staff development. For the University, research is inextricably interwoven with teaching. This informs all staff appointments, promotions and much of the staff development activity; 75 per cent of full-time staff have doctorates, placing the University 16th in the table of all UK higher education institutions, and 57 per cent of academic staff have fellowship or higher status with the Higher Education Academy. The Personnel Office organises the majority of staff training, which the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) oversees, ensuring it is tailored to the specific needs of the University and its academic and professional staff, but also colleagues at partner institutions.

2.25 The University's performance management review system and annual peer review of teaching engages staff in continuous reflective practice and identifies training needs. The University operates a well-structured system for new teaching staff to progress from early career teaching, linked to the Higher Education Academy Fellowship Scheme, to doctoral study. The University meets all costs and integrates the development programme into the staff member's workload allocation. The Faculty of Education's 'key practitioners' initiative enables experienced colleagues to mentor new staff in a confidential and safe environment and the University is considering embedding this across the institution. The University's strategic, comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting staff development to enhance learning and teaching practices is **good practice**.

2.26 The University offers an annual prize for engagement with innovative teaching and learning, while the Students' Union recognises members of staff through its teaching award scheme. The recent National Student Survey places the University 5th nationally for teaching and learning, mirroring student comments that teaching is of an exceptionally high standard. The annual review and enhancement process provides a means by which the effectiveness of learning and teaching is evaluated and enhanced at programme, faculty and institutional level. The process of monitoring and review is deliberative and draws on reliable and comprehensive data. The analytical nature of this process enables clear action planning to enhance the student learning experience.

2.27 The University's strategic commitment to learning and teaching, supported by a comprehensive and coordinated programme of staff development, enable this Expectation to be met. A range of positive quality data indicates that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.28 The University outlines a holistic and personalised approach to education underpinned by equality of opportunity. It regards student development and achievement as a joint endeavour between staff and students and works with the Students' Union and other stakeholders to provide and promote a wide range of personal, academic and professional development opportunities.

2.29 The Dean of Students oversees all student-focused services and support systems, which the University collectively terms 'Student Support and Wellbeing'. For the Network of Hope, the Experience and Academic Quality Committee meets regularly to consider the effectiveness of student support and experience across the partnerships. For postgraduate students, the Research Degrees Sub-committee maintains oversight of student achievement.

2.30 In its 'Plan for Student Success' the University aims to provide all students with appropriate professional development, academic and personal support. Programme design takes account of student development, progression and achievement, which is then reviewed continuously through the annual review and enhancement process. Likewise, the Student Services Group reviews the activities of all of the Student Support and Wellbeing units. The Learning and Teaching Committee reports to Senate on the effectiveness of the plan for success, and a joint autumn meeting of the Academic Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee ensures that support and wellbeing activities interact fully with curricular reviews.

2.31 The team tested the Expectation by considering the University's mission and vision, its strategies around pastoral support and job descriptions of key staff. The team looked at review reports and how these progress through the University committee structure and confirmed these processes and outcomes with students, and academic and professional services staff.

2.32 The University, in line with its founding principles, serves a diverse community. The University exceeds national benchmarks for participation of under-represented groups in higher education. Aware of its recruitment profile, the University provides comprehensive and tailored support to meet the specific needs of these students. Academic support is provided through personal tutorials and complemented by more tailored pastoral support available through central student services. The learning support team assesses the needs of any students who have disclosed a disability and puts in place a bespoke learning support plan. The University undertakes modifications to assessment tasks or other reasonable adjustments required. A named contact in each department ensures that staff are fully informed of any disclosed disabilities and monitors the provision of student support needs. The Equal Opportunities Committee also reviews the performance of disabled students to ensure parity of experience.

2.33 Undergraduate tutorial groups serve academic and pastoral functions. Personal tutors are the first point of contact, but level coordinators and programme directors have key responsibilities for student development and progression. Students meet tutors individually to discuss achievements, progress, development and support needs. Postgraduate students meet their supervisors to review progress and personal research skills development.

Students whom the team met regarded the academic and pastoral support they receive from their personal tutor as key to the overall sense of community.

2.34 The professional services staff work closely with academic teams to ensure a seamless and integrated approach to supporting students in the achievement of their qualification. Academic staff receive information about student support and wellbeing during their induction, enabling them to signpost students to the other services within the University. Faculty-based committee meetings often include representatives from the support service areas, for example the library, careers service and disability support. This ensures that the academic provision is reviewed and developed with the involvement of key support staff, and that these staff are able to meet the needs of students within a particular subject area. Academic and support staff whom the team met commented on the positive working relationship they share and the importance of embedding support within the students' learning experience. Students whom the team met were also complimentary of the comprehensive and accessible support they received. The effective integration of student support services within the academic provision to enhance student engagement with their studies is **good practice**.

2.35 All new students receive a University-wide induction supplemented by a department-based induction for their chosen programme of study. The University has recently adopted good practice identified at its partner colleges (through the Network of Hope) and now offers transition weeks for students entering their second and third years. International students can access online resources and are assigned an international 'Hope buddy' who meets them at their point of arrival. There is an orientation programme and a first-semester course focused on living, working and studying in the UK. Students whom the team met and a recent internal audit regard induction as a positive experience.

2.36 The Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability recognises employability as an integral part of the student experience. It aims to prepare students to succeed in the competitive global labour market. The University has a comprehensive framework to support employability and its core committees review achievement against key performance indicators. The University offers a range of awards, placements and exchange opportunities and aims to develop leadership and wider skills through extracurricular activities, such as sporting clubs, social events and volunteer experiences. All students have access to the 'My Careers' site and can access all support services.

2.37 Students have access to resources through the virtual learning environment, and they can also go to the Student Gateway or Students' Union for information and advice. All programmes include information and guidance on core skills to support development and progression. Students can book individual support sessions with faculty librarians and can request assistance via text and a Welcome Application. The library team monitor the use of library and learning spaces and report to the Library Steering Group. Students whom the team met confirmed the usefulness of the VLE and the support provided by library staff.

2.38 The University meets the Expectation through its comprehensive approach to welfare, tutorial, induction, skills development and employability. In particular, the way in which support services are closely integrated within the academic provision make a positive contribution to this Expectation. The associated level of risk is therefore low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.39 The University's commitment to student engagement is expressed in its Corporate Plan and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. This commitment is operationalised through the Hope Charter which clearly defines the responsibilities of staff, students and the Students' Union to each other.

2.40 A range of formal and informal mechanisms exist for engaging with students individually and collectively. There is a student representation system whereby there is an elected representative for each programme. Representatives attend staff-student liaison committees, and a nominated person from the pool of programme representatives also attends faculty-level meetings. A postgraduate research student attends the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Student representatives from the Students' Union are invited to attend University-level committees. This system provides opportunities for the student voice to be articulated at all levels of the University. Equivalent student representation structures exist at partner organisations.

2.41 Individual students are invited to complete feedback surveys both for their programme of study and on the wider student experience, including support services. The results of these surveys are considered through the annual review and enhancement process and through the work of faculty and University committees. Students are able to approach staff directly, including the personal tutor, to provide informal feedback. There are also opportunities for students to be involved in quality assurance processes such as programme approval and department review.

2.42 The team considered information provided to students on opportunities for engagement, training for student representatives, minutes of meetings attended by representatives, and annual review and enhancement reports. The team triangulated this evidence with students from across a range of provision, including from partner organisations, the Students' Union officers and academic and senior staff within the University.

2.43 The review team found the student representative system to be effective in engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement. Unusually, ownership of the representation system rests with the University although all representatives are elected by students. This deliberate strategy has been agreed with the Students' Union and ensures sufficient commitment and resources are available to make the system work effectively and has helped to provide greater consistency. Staff-student liaison committees are generally well attended and are the core communication channel through which the student voice is heard and acted upon at a local level. Selected representatives are also invited to faculty boards and other faculty-level meetings but attendance at these meetings has been variable, although there have been improvements since the start of the 2015-16 academic year.

2.44 There is also evidence of student engagement at University level, for example through attendance at the Learning and Teaching Committee. This enables the student voice to inform strategy and enhancement initiatives that impact on the student learning experience. The University has also established a Student Sounding Board, made up of programme representatives who meet regularly with senior staff to provide feedback on

University-wide issues that extend beyond their academic subject. In response to feedback received, the Board now also includes a representative from the Students' Union.

2.45 Awareness of opportunities for student engagement is raised through a student bulletin, Students' Union mailings, department and programme-specific advertising, and through the student voice section of the website. The Students' Union, supported by University staff, runs comprehensive training sessions to support elected representatives in fulfilling their role effectively. Student representatives whom the team met confirmed that they found the training helpful.

2.46 The analysis of student feedback data is an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes and the regular business of faculty and University committees. The results of surveys, including the National Student Survey, are reviewed at programme level through the annual review process and at faculty quality, learning and teaching committees. Departments also convene focus groups or undertake additional work with students to better understand local survey data and to explore ways of enhancing the student experience. A University-wide overview of feedback data is taken through the three standing committees of Senate.

2.47 Support services also undertake comprehensive and focused reviews, enabling student opinion to inform review and enhancement activities. Across the University, other initiatives, such as suggestion boxes in the library and the Gateway Building, provide opportunities for informal feedback.

2.48 There is good evidence of the University responding to the student voice and closing the feedback loop. 'You Said ... We Did' notices are used across the institution to advertise improvements made in response to student feedback. Other mechanisms for communicating include newsletters, information on the University website and VLE, and direct feedback at meetings attended by representatives. Students whom the team met felt that the University was responsive to the student voice and were able to cite numerous examples of improvements made in response to their views. These include changes to the timing of tutorial sessions for part-time students and the provision of a mobile phone application to access the VLE for students at partner organisations.

2.49 The University is committed to reviewing and enhancing further the opportunities for student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The effectiveness of existing structures is formally reviewed and there is evidence of improvements being made. For example, since 2014-15 all programme approvals must include a student as a panel member.

2.50 The University has a wide range of formal and informal mechanisms for capturing and responding to the student voice, and this is an area in which it continues to seek improvement. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

Findings

2.51 The University has a comprehensive Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy with detailed information about the principles underpinning its assessment of student learning. This includes the University's norms for assessment and the importance of developmental feedback. The University operates a four-week turnaround policy for feedback on assessed work, which is monitored by the Registrar. Procedures for handling academic misconduct are set out in the University's Regulations and Conventions.

2.52 Arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) are set out in a formal policy and the Framework of Qualifications includes information on the volume of credit that may be achieved through this route. The APL policy provides detailed information on the processes for assessing and accrediting prior learning and stipulates the maximum amount of credit that is normally permitted. The team found that the Framework of Qualifications refers to different levels of credit exemption from the APL policy without making it explicitly clear that these are exceptions to the norm. Also, the process for considering exceptions outside the normal limits is expressed differently in the two documents and there is no cross-referencing between the documentation. Given that these documents are available through the website and may be accessed by prospective applicants, there is a need for greater clarity in this area. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that by June 2016 the University ensures clarity and consistency in the policy for the accreditation of prior learning.

2.53 Formal oversight of assessment processes and the award of academic credit is through the University's examining bodies. Assessment results for individual modules or credit-rated blocks are confirmed by a panel of examiners. Progression between levels and conferment of the final award is through the relevant Board of Examiners. Oversight at University level is through the Standing Sub-Committee on Assessment, which advises Senate on amendments to academic regulations and provides assurance that all aspects of assessment are conducted in line with published policies.

2.54 The team reviewed policies and procedures governing assessment, sample cases involving the accreditation of prior learning, information provided to staff and students, external examiner reports and minutes of boards and committees. The team tested this evidence base through meetings with staff and students.

2.55 Overall, the University has a sound and comprehensive framework for managing assessment. While the team found that documentation relating to APL could be made clearer, in practice the University adheres to the procedures in its published policy and gives thorough consideration to APL cases that fall outside its prescribed norms.

2.56 Staff involved in assessment are provided with a thorough briefing during their induction, supplemented by detailed written guidance and supported by more experienced colleagues. The use of defined assessment criteria ensures transparency and consistency in the assessment process. Further assurance on the validity and reliability of marking by staff is provided through internal and external moderation processes.

2.57 Information on assessment to students is provided through module and programme handbooks. These include information on the overarching strategy for assessment as well as more specific assessment criteria for particular tasks. Students whom the team met, including those at partner organisations, confirmed that they were clear about what is expected from them in terms of their assessment, and that feedback on assessed work was timely and developmental. Students are also provided with opportunities for one-to-one dialogue with their personal tutors to further contextualise their feedback.

2.58 The operation of examining bodies is consistent with documented regulations and ensures fairness in the award of academic credit. External examiners are required to be present at each tier of assessment boards. Formal records are kept for all meetings, and decisions are recorded in a way that can be communicated clearly to staff and students, although the team noted a need for greater clarity in the process for converting grades achieved through study abroad arrangements into the University's award (see recommendation under Expectation A3.2).

2.59 Assessment is considered as part of the annual review process for programmes. Through reflection on external examiner feedback, student feedback and achievement data, staff identify areas for enhancement. University-wide feedback surveys and the work of the assessment boards inform strategic improvements. Recent examples include greater clarity on the tasks and processes for reassessment and improved training for exam invigilators.

2.60 The review team concludes that, overall, the University has a robust framework for managing assessment and the Expectation is met. Staff and students are provided with clear information and guidance on assessment and the University makes effective use of data to enhance assessment practice. The recommendation under this area relates to the need to update documentation and therefore poses a low risk.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.61 Following the publication of the most recent version of the Quality Code *Chapter B7: External Examining*, Senate approved a significantly revised external examining framework and handbook. The handbook clearly defines external examiners' duties and is made available to examiners and staff in hard copy, and to students through the website. The Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degrees includes guidance on the process for, and requirements relating to, the appointment and role of external examiners.

2.62 External examiners moderate student work, advise on major modifications and verify the standards of awards offered. For programmes with a professional practice qualification, such as the BA Primary Teaching (Qualified Teacher Status), they also undertake moderation and review of professional placement activities and assessments. Examiners comment on the overall management of the programme and the standard of assessment as part of their annual reports, which progress from award boards to faculty boards. The work of these boards informs Academic Committee, which reports to Senate where oversight of the external examining process ultimately rests.

2.63 The team tested the Expectation by considering regulations, policies, resources available online, and a sample of external examiner and annual review and enhancement reports. The team cross-referenced this evidence in conversation with staff and students.

2.64 The system for appointing external examiners is transparent and rigorous. Faculty executive officers have operational responsibility for managing appointments in line with policies and regulations. To ensure impartiality, faculty boards approve departmental level appointments and submit a standard nomination form and accompanying curriculum vitae to Academic Committee for consideration. Academic Committee considers the nomination and recommends appointments to Senate - the only body with authority to appoint external examiners. This ensures that appointments are overseen at the most senior level within the institution. The University reserves the right to terminate an external examiner's appointment at any time and it can also reject a nomination. External examiners for the Network of Hope provision are appointed following the same process for on-campus provision.

2.65 The appointment of postgraduate examiners is equally thorough. The Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degrees outline arrangements in respect of the appointment of external examiners for research degrees. The head of department must support any nomination, and the Chair of Research Degrees Sub-Committee endorses the appointment prior to approval by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The postgraduate research support officer provides guidance to external examiners upon appointment, and the University Registrar, Associate Dean (postgraduate research students) and the appointed Chair of the Oral Examination can provide further support.

2.66 All examiners receive a comprehensive induction into the University and its processes; inexperienced examiners receive additional support. A dedicated webpage for external examiners details University structures, regulations and general information. Subject teams provide programme and module-specific information. The University organises an annual examiners' event to provide training and opportunities to comment on University policies, procedures and wider developments. The combination of training and support secures the standards of all examiner appointments.

2.67 Staff confirm assessment tasks with external examiners, who subsequently receive samples of assessed work. Some examiners attend assessment events or view audio/visual recordings and the University encourages examiners to visit and meet with students. Through the reporting system, examiners comment on moderation and administration arrangements, and confirm receipt of sufficient evidence to enable them to fulfil their role effectively. The report template addresses the key aspects of academic standards and quality and encourages objective critical commentary. External examiners assure the University in respect of attaining threshold standards and alignment with the FHEQ, although some commentaries could be more explicit in this respect.

2.68 There is a robust system in place for considering and responding to feedback provided by external examiners. Reports identify both features of good practice and recommendations for enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Through the annual review and enhancement process staff address recommendations arising from external examiner reports and incorporate these into the action plan for the programme. A copy of the external examiner report is also appended to the programme's annual review and enhancement report. Where there are serious concerns, examiners may also submit a confidential report directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

2.69 Three faculty-level external examiners strengthen the oversight of academic standards. They attend award boards, consult on major regulatory changes and support less experienced examiners. Faculty examiners assure the University that its processes for assessment are in line with policies and procedures and take an overview of threshold academic standards of the taught provision across the faculty. Deans consider their reports at faculty boards and a faculty-level annual review and enhancement report considers the faculty examiner's report. This allows the identification of common themes and provides opportunities for sharing good practice both within faculties and across the University through reporting to the Academic Committee.

2.70 The University is proactive in its dissemination of information to students about the external examining system. Student handbooks contain information about the role of the external examiner. Reports and the University's response to them are shared with students through the VLE. Awareness of these reports and the work of the external examiner is raised through discussions at committee meetings where student representatives are present. Students whom the team met confirmed their understanding of the role of the examiner and demonstrated a general awareness of the availability of reports.

2.71 The University's arrangements for external examining centre on a rigorous process of reporting, management and review. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.72 The University's framework for the monitoring and review of its academic provision comprises an annual review and five-yearly departmental review. Further details on the operation of these processes can be found in paragraphs 1.33 and 1.34.

2.73 The review team tested the effectiveness of the University's processes for programme review through consideration of a sample of annual review and enhancement reports at programme, department and faculty level, self-evaluations and reports for departmental review, and minutes of committees that have oversight of these processes. The team also held meetings with staff and students who had been involved in programme review.

2.74 Since the 2013-14 academic year, the University has revised its approach to annual review and the new process is designed to provide an increased focus on enhancement. The move to the new annual review and enhancement process involved the use of revised templates and thorough staff training. Academic staff whom the team met were supportive of the new enhancement-focused process and commented particularly on the way in which it has encouraged staff to develop a culture of continuous improvement.

2.75 A review of completed annual review and enhancement reports confirms that the process results in a detailed critical and reflective evaluation of programmes informed by a wide range of internal and external feedback. Action plans arising from the process address areas of quality assurance but also demonstrate a commitment to enhancement. Report templates encourage the identification of good practice for wider dissemination across the department, faculty and University. Faculty-level reports summarise common themes arising across programmes and departments for consideration by the joint meeting of the Academic Committee, and Learning and Teaching Committee. Strategic priorities for enhancement and for the following academic year are informed by the outcomes of the annual review process. Examples of University-wide improvements include the embedding of additional local support for staff to enhance learning and teaching and the promotion of good practice through a dedicated section of the University website. The significant emphasis on development and improvement within the annual monitoring process, which informs the University's strategy and priorities for enhancement, is **good practice**.

2.76 Programmes are periodically reviewed (and reapproved) every five years usually through the process of departmental review. Documents submitted by departments in preparation for the review, and the resulting panel reports, demonstrate the process to be thorough and consistently applied across the University's provision. Departmental reviews provide a long-term perspective of the academic provision and involve a critical analysis of the ongoing currency and validity of individual programmes within the department. The review involves the use of a panel whose membership includes externals and a student. The team met a student who had recently been involved in the process and commented positively on the way in which the review encouraged engagement with the student voice and supported the student to participate as a full member of the panel. Departmental review ensures that programmes continue to align with the University's overarching strategy and mission.

2.77 The outcomes from both annual and departmental review are overseen by the relevant faculty and reported to the three standing committees of Senate. This ensures that action plans to address recommendations arising from the review are progressed in a timely manner. Adherence to the process is also monitored through the Faculty Executive Officer and Senior Academic Quality Adviser. The University also undertakes audits to evaluate the effectiveness with which its processes are implemented and this enables further refinements to be made.

2.78 In summary, the University's processes for the annual and periodic review of its programmes are effective and implemented consistently. The emphasis on enhancement within the annual review process makes a particularly positive contribution to this area. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.79 The University has separate and clearly defined procedures for handling student complaints and academic appeals. Both procedures stipulate the grounds on which a complaint or appeal can be made, the indicative timescales for each stage of the process and the sources of advice and information available to those accessing the procedures. Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the University's processes are advised of recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). For partner organisations, the legal agreement makes explicit the respective responsibilities for handling complaints and appeals.

2.80 The team tested the effectiveness with which the University operates its procedures through a review of information made available to students, summary reports of appeals and complaints, and minutes of relevant committees. The team spoke with staff and students, including those from partner organisations, to check that their understanding aligned with published procedures and that there was awareness within the institution of the available formal processes.

2.81 The University's procedures for managing appeals and complaints are clear, comprehensive and easily accessible through its website. Students are reminded of and signposted to these procedures through the student handbook. From meetings with students it became apparent that most seek to resolve issues informally and have access to a number of different people with whom they can raise a concern. While students were not familiar with the operation of formal procedures, they were generally aware of their existence and where they could go to seek advice.

2.82 The University has mechanisms in place to support the fair and consistent application of procedures for complaints and appeals. For academic appeals, students are required to use a standard pro forma, and to ensure objectivity, appeals are considered by panels that comprise trained senior academic advisers or faculty research degree coordinators (for postgraduate research students). All those involved in handling complaints and academic appeals are provided with thorough training to undertake their role effectively. Students are advised of their right to access independent advice and guidance from the Students' Union, and in the case of academic appeals from the Faculty Senior Academic Adviser. All academic appeals are overseen by the Registrar and complaints by the University Secretary.

2.83 The University monitors its appeals and complaints procedures, reviewing the processes and issues that have been raised within them with a view to enhancing them further. Summary reports, which reflect both on lessons learned from individual cases and overarching trends, are considered in detail by the Student Services Group. The outcomes of these reports and any improvements made to existing procedures are disseminated to senior academic staff, including the Senior Management Team. Additionally, Senate receives an annual report on the number of complaints and appeals dealt with at the formal stages, a summary of case outcomes, and future action taken as a result of cases.

2.84 The review team concludes that the University operates accessible, clear and timely procedures for complaints and appeals that are regularly reviewed, monitored and

enhanced. Due to the positive relationship between staff and students, there is a preference for informal resolution. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others

Findings

2.85 As part of its wider mission and strategy, the University is committed to working with other faith-based institutions as part of its philosophy of the Collegium. Since its last QAA review, the University has significantly reduced the number of collaborative partners with which it works and the focus is now on high-quality provision that aligns to the University's approach to managing its campus-based provision.

2.86 The University's collaborative arrangements account for a relatively small part of its provision. This includes the delivery of postgraduate research awards through Newman University, St Mary's Twickenham and the Maryvale Institute. The only franchised provision is the delivery of a professional doctorate (EdD) through St Mary's. The University maintains its long-standing partnership with two Roman Catholic sixth-form colleges, St Mary's College, Blackburn and Holy Cross College, Bury, collectively referred to as the Network of Hope. Through the Network of Hope, all teaching and assessment is undertaken by University staff at the partner organisations. There is currently one dual award whereby students complete a programme of study at the University and at a University in France leading to a master's qualification from both institutions.

2.87 The framework for the approval, review and oversight of the partner organisations is set out in the Collaborative Provision Handbook. Oversight of all collaborative arrangements is through the Collaborative Provision Sub-Group (CPSG). Reporting to Academic Committee, this Group has a specific remit to assure the University of the academic quality and standards of awards delivered through partner organisations. For the Network of Hope there is an additional layer of oversight through the monthly meetings of the Experience and Academic Quality Committee. This Committee ensures coordination of activity across the two partnerships and also acts a forum for sharing good practice. The University maintains a register of all its collaborative arrangements.

2.88 Other provision that falls within the scope of this Expectation is the delivery of work-based learning through partnerships with employers and study abroad arrangements where students undertake a defined portion of their learning at an overseas institution. The quality and oversight of placements is managed locally by the relevant faculty. For school-based placements, which form a significant part of the University's provision, there is a small team within the Faculty of Education who coordinate the arrangements. For students undertaking study abroad, detailed arrangements are set out in individual student learning agreements.

2.89 The review team tested the effectiveness of procedures by examining the University's Collaborative Provision Handbook, minutes of the Collaborative Provision Sub-Group and Network of Hope Experience and Academic Oversight Committee, and approval and review documentation for a sample of partners. The team also reviewed the procedures for managing work placements and exchange schemes. The team held meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, senior and teaching staff, professional services staff and students.

2.90 Since the last QAA review, the University has considerably strengthened its arrangements for delivering learning opportunities through partner organisations and for

ensuring the collaborative provision register is accurate, complete and regularly updated. The Collaborative Provision Handbook is comprehensive and closely aligns to the expectations of the Quality Code. The approval process is robust, well documented and overseen by senior bodies within the University. Consistency and objectivity in the process for approval is achieved through the involvement of the Senior Academic Quality Adviser in all new proposals and the use of clear criteria for assessing the suitability of potential partnerships.

2.91 Legally binding agreements are in place, with appropriate signatories, for all partnerships, and set out in detail the rights and obligations of the respective parties. Agreements include clauses to safeguard the student experience should a partnership be terminated. The team is satisfied that where the University has withdrawn from a number of partnerships since the last QAA review, appropriate arrangements were put in place to support affected students in achieving their qualification.

2.92 Provision delivered through partner organisations is subject to comprehensive annual review. For the Network of Hope, the review of programmes is embedded within the University's annual review and enhancement process for the same awards delivered on campus, although there is separate and explicit consideration of the Network of Hope provision. For the other partners which only deliver postgraduate awards, an overarching annual report of the provision is prepared by the partner and submitted to the University. At a local level, consideration of issues arising from partner organisations is overseen and managed through the faculty structures. To ensure close monitoring of the overall academic health of the partnership, relevant reports are also received and reviewed by the CPSG for all partners, by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee for those partners delivering research degrees and for the Network of Hope through the Experience and Academic Oversight Committee. Together these processes and structures ensure there is scrutiny of both individual programmes and the overall partnership.

2.93 As well as serving a quality assurance function, the work of the CPSG and Network of Hope Experience and Academic Oversight Committee has been important in the identification and dissemination of good practice. For example, transition induction between levels of study delivered at Network of Hope partners has been extended to all undergraduate students at the University.

2.94 The review team met a range of staff and students from across a selection of partner organisations. From meetings it was evident that these partnerships are mutually positive; staff at partner organisations are clear about their respective responsibilities and value the support provided by the University. Overall, students whom the team met also reported positive learning experiences, although some postgraduate research students commented on the lack of access to a full range of learning resources (see findings under Expectation B11).

2.95 Very few students currently undertake study abroad, but for those who do there is a thorough assessment of the suitability and quality of learning opportunities that will be made available by the overseas institution. Appropriate safeguards are put in place through personalised learning agreements for each student. However, as previously noted under Expectation A3.2, the University would benefit from a clearer process for importing students' grades from study abroad arrangements.

2.96 Arrangements for placements depend on the nature of work-based learning and the size of the provision. All placements are initially assessed for their suitability, and clear expectations are set for all those involved, including workplace staff and students. For programmes that attract qualified teacher status, external examiners are involved in the moderation and review of professional placement activities and assessments to provide

assurance of professional standards and quality. Students whom the team met who had undertaken work-based learning confirmed they were provided with adequate support and guidance.

2.97 Overall, the team found that the University has responded fully to the outcomes of the previous QAA review and strengthened its processes for managing collaborative provision. Quality assurance arrangements are proportionate to the type and size of provision that the University has at present. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.98 The University organises postgraduate provision around research groups, which exist to inform teaching across the faculties. It aims to have internationally recognised excellent research in all departments, which are all research-active. Until 2009, when the University acquired research degree awarding powers, the University of Liverpool validated the postgraduate programmes. Nine postgraduate students have yet to complete their University of Liverpool Award. There are approximately 140 postgraduate students in total, which the University aims to increase, and there are three postgraduate partnerships with other institutions.

2.99 Senate maintains oversight of postgraduate programmes through the Research Committee and the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The Dean of Science chairs the subcommittee and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) Steering Group, enabling interaction between the two aspects of research. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee develops the institutional framework, procedures and requirements for each postgraduate research programme with the Registrar. Postgraduate research student handbooks describe the regulations in a clear and accessible manner. The modular postgraduate taught curriculum (professional doctorates) clearly aligns with the national framework of the Joint Research Councils and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity in UK research. The University has recently increased the requirement for students enrolling on postgraduate awards to ensure capability to study.

2.100 To test the Expectation, the team considered the policies and handbooks for postgraduate research degrees, minutes of the committees involved in the oversight of postgraduate research provision and results of surveys. The team also spoke to staff involved in the supervision and support of research degrees, and postgraduate research students.

2.101 The management of postgraduate research provision is secure and aligns with wider University systems. The Associate Dean (Postgraduate Research Students) advises on strategy and policy, oversees all postgraduate operations and sits on the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The Postgraduate Research Support Officer manages communication between faculties and students in relation to admissions, progression and examination. The post also maintains central records of all postgraduate provision and plays a significant role in the development of partnership provision. Students are highly positive about the impact of this administrative overview.

2.102 Admission procedures ensure that research proposals align with departmental research profiles. Applicants submit an expression of interest, departments consider if they have potential supervisors, and heads of department confirm support for the application. Students then submit a full application and attend an interview. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee makes the final decision for both the University and partner organisations. Faculty research ethics committees review proposals for alignment with the Research Ethics Policy and report to the Research Ethics Sub-Committee. In this respect, application processes are effective and students are generally positive about their experience.

2.103 However, students whom the team met and a postgraduate survey identify resource issues, such as not being able to contact staff during summer vacations when submissions are often due or the lack of relevant library resources. In particular, distance learners and students on the professional doctorate programme, who choose their research topic at the end of year two, reported a lack of access to appropriate specialist resources. Staff consider resourcing during the application stage, but the current system only records this when the University refuses an application because of inappropriate resources. The system is less clear when need is at the extremities of the University's resources. Therefore, the team **recommends** that by June 2016 the University should ensure the appropriate evaluation of the physical resource needs of individual postgraduate research students.

2.104 Induction for new students combines departmental and University-wide events. Students confirm they meet regularly with their supervisory team and maintain a personal development record tracking their training needs and development. Students discuss these at a formal annual review with their supervisory team to address targets and determine progression. Staff formally record these meetings, which provides essential evidence for the annual monitoring process. Faculties review all annual monitoring reviews for consistency, before these reports go to the Progression and Award Board. Students whom the team met confirmed that supervision is of a high quality.

2.105 The process for the appointment of research supervisors is considered and thorough. Regulations define the supervision appointment process, which requires four supervisory roles: Director of Studies to oversee the entire PhD process; research supervisors; external advisers; and research advisers. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee ensures that supervisors meet the criteria before formally approving any appointments. The Postgraduate Research Support Officer ensures that no tutor exceeds supervision of six research students. Staff delivering at master's level and above are research-active, but there is bespoke training for staff who wish to supervise.

2.106 The appointment of external examiners aligns with the Quality Code as well as the expectations of the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) and Vitae. Examiners read the student thesis and for oral examinations independently ensure that MPhil and PhD students meet threshold academic standards. For professional doctorates, a second external examiner oversees the programme's taught phase. Examiner reports feed into the University's annual review and enhancement process. Student representative feedback gathered at postgraduate research student meetings and from the online student survey also informs annual review. The Research Degrees Sub-Committee reviews the resulting picture of the postgraduate experience, ensuring oversight across the provision.

2.107 Programmes require that all students have the necessary skills to support their study. Workshops across the academic year, run by faculties and departments, explore essential skills. The University has also clarified its training for graduate teaching assistants, and students confirmed the improvement to the support they receive. The process for identifying and addressing unsatisfactory progress is clear and fair, with the relevant Progression and Award Board making the final decision on whether a student may continue.

2.108 Overall, the University has a robust regulatory framework surrounding research degrees, and operates effective management structures for the oversight of this provision. The review team identifies one recommendation under this Expectation. While the system for assessing the physical resource needs of students is broadly adequate, improvement is required to ensure that all students have access to the relevant resources. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.109 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.110 All Expectations are met and the level of risk is low in all but one case: Expectation B11 where a moderate risk is identified.

2.111 The review team has identified two recommendations under this judgement area. The first relates to the need to ensure clarity and consistency in the policy for the accreditation of prior learning (Expectation B6). This requires the University to review and update existing documentation and therefore in the view of the team poses a low risk. The second recommendation concerns the need to improve the system for evaluating the physical resource needs of postgraduate research students to ensure appropriate resources are in place. The team found that while the system is broadly adequate, there are some shortcomings in the rigour with which it was applied and therefore it poses a moderate risk to Expectation B11.

2.112 There are three features of good practice, which, in the view of the review team, make a particularly positive contribution to the management of this judgement area. These relate to the early and considered engagement with stakeholders during the approval and design of programmes (Expectation B1), the University's approach to supporting staff development to enhance learning and teaching (Expectation B3), and the effective integration of student support services within the academic provision (Expectation B4).

2.113 In summary, the University makes available to its students appropriate learning opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the award for which they are studying. Recommendations relate either to the need to update documentation or to improve the effectiveness of existing systems, which, in their current state, do not pose a significant risk to the quality of student learning opportunities. Previous responses to external review provide confidence that areas of weaknesses will be addressed promptly and professionally. The review team concludes therefore that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The University provides information to a range of audiences including students and staff, applicants, employers and other stakeholders. Information is available through a range of media, primarily the University's internal and external websites; however, printed documentation, such as prospectuses and handbooks, is also used. Academic regulations, governance arrangements, quality assurance handbooks and procedures are made available on the website. The Hope Charter, opportunities for students to become more involved in the University and the support services on offer are also publicised on the website.

3.2 The University's Public Information Policy establishes processes for ensuring that published information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and that there are clear lines of responsibility. All information published is approved by the Corporate Communications team, in some instances following initial approval from the head of the relevant department. There is a single academic contact for each department who is responsible for web content for their area. All of these staff receive appropriate training for their role.

3.3 The team considered a range of information available through the University website and VLE, handbooks from different faculties, a sample of transcripts and certificates, and the Public Information Policy. The team clarified with students, staff and employers that the information is accurate and fit for purpose, and confirmed with relevant staff that there is appropriate awareness about how information is approved and updated.

3.4 The University makes available a wide range of helpful information to its internal and external stakeholders. This includes information about the legal status of the University, the organisational structure, policies and strategies, the Collaborative Provision Register and minutes of key decision-making bodies, as well as data about students and staff. The University's prospectus includes information about its programmes of study, support services and other facts about the city and the University to enable applicants to make an informed decision. For international students, the University provides key information on fees and scholarships, immigration and visas, and studying and living in the UK. Students whom the team met confirmed that they had access to full and detailed information prior to and during the application stage. Employers the team spoke to also confirmed that they were provided with appropriate information to engage with the University.

3.5 The University is also compliant with data requests from external agencies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Higher Education Statistical Agency. This data is collated by designated staff and subject to review by the University's internal auditors. Policies and procedures are subject to regular review and updating. Changes to academic policies and regulations must be approved by Senate prior to publication and use. However, the team noted one instance of a lack of clarity in the procedures relating to the accreditation of prior learning between the policy and the Framework of Qualifications (see recommendation under Expectation B6).

3.6 Students are also provided with comprehensive information during their period of study to support them in achieving their qualification. The induction week for all new students includes sessions with the Dean and departmental staff as well as wider orientation activities prior to the commencement of formal teaching and sessions across both campuses. Personalised information is provided for students commencing their programme at different points in the academic cycle, PGCE students, and postgraduate students. Programme handbooks form a key reference point for students and include information on the teaching team, programme aims and learning outcomes, assessment and rules relating to the conduct of assessment, academic referencing, recommended reading materials and information on the library and online resources, including the VLE. Students whom the team met confirmed that handbooks are accurate and provide useful information to help guide them in succeeding in their studies.

3.7 There are clear protocols for the approval and publication of information. While Senate is ultimately responsible for the oversight of information, in practice this is delegated to identified staff within the University. All printed material is produced by the Corporate Communications Team, with approval of programme-specific information sought from the relevant department. The accuracy of the website is maintained through a content management system which requires approval from the relevant team prior to the upload of information. Programme handbooks conform to a University-wide template which is then contextualised by the team. This ensures consistency in generic information such as academic regulations while providing students with programme-specific guidance. Academic and corporate communications staff whom the team met were fully aware of their respective responsibilities for the production of information and the processes to be followed.

3.8 Where provision is delivered in partnership with others, responsibilities for information are clearly set out in legal agreements. Although in all cases the University has oversight of the information produced by partners, all information must be reviewed and approved by the University prior to its first use.

3.9 Upon completion of their studies all students are issued with a certificate from the University which records their academic achievement. The production of information to support the transcript is governed by the University's assessment, progression and award process, with oversight by Student Administration. This is supplemented by a transcript in the form of a Diploma Supplement. All undergraduates receive a Higher Education Achievement Report.

3.10 Overall, the University has a sound policy for the production and review of the information it makes available to its stakeholders. While the team noted that information on APL could be made clearer, this only relates to a small area of provision and in the view of the team poses a low risk. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.11 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information the University produces about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.12 Overall, the University operates effective mechanisms to ensure the information it produces for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The recommendation identified under Expectation B6, which relates to the need to ensure clarity and consistency in the policy for the accreditation of prior learning, is relevant to this area. The recommendation is concerned with the need to update existing documentation in a particular area of policy, and therefore in the view of the team poses a low risk to the management of this area. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1 The overarching framework for improving the quality of student learning opportunities is set out in the Enhancement Strategy developed in 2015. Prior to this, enhancement was embedded within the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy but a separate strategy was developed to provide a deepened focus on enhancement that is embraced across the University. The Enhancement Strategy sets out underlying principles, the quality enhancement framework to support deliberative and systematic improvements, and core responsibilities across the institutions.

4.2 The University considers enhancement to be embedded within its primary quality assurance tools including annual review and enhancement, periodic departmental reviews, and in the external examining system. In addition, there are University-wide mechanisms for sharing good practice, such as the staff development programme and associated initiatives, and specific resources to promote enhancement in learning and teaching.

4.3 The implementation and oversight of enhancement is through the University's formal governance structures. The terms of reference for the committees of Senate and faculty quality, learning and teaching committees include explicit responsibility for improving the student learning experience. The Learning and Teaching Committee has overall responsibility for operationalising the Enhancement Strategy and for reporting to Senate on progress against strategic priorities.

4.4 In reviewing the University's approach to enhancement, the team considered annual review and enhancement reports, departmental review documentation, external examiner reports and minutes of University and faculty-level committees. The team met staff from across the University, and from partners, who were able to provide examples of the operation of processes for enhancement, particularly the impact of the revised Strategy and through the annual review exercise.

4.5 The University has a strategic, considered and embedded approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee confirm that strategic efforts for improving the quality of the learning experience are deliberate and monitored regularly. There is also evidence that all staff are encouraged to take ownership for and participate in University-wide improvements. The reporting structure is effective in ensuring that strategic priorities are informed by work that is undertaken at a local level within individual academic units and that staff are engaged in the delivery of enhancement initiatives.

4.6 The annual review and enhancement process is the University's main mechanism for reviewing and enhancing its academic provision on a regular basis. This process is effective in encouraging staff to explicitly focus on enhancement, as well as quality assurance, as part of their review of programmes. The annual review of programmes informs faculty-level annual review reports and enables themes to be captured, which are then used to set the agenda for enhancement for the following year. Reports of this process are comprehensive, make systematic use of robust information and focus on developing the provision further. Data considered through the annual review process includes National Student Survey results, feedback from external examiners and outcomes from peer observation. The data is considered and reflected on in detail both at programme level and

across the University, ensuring that enhancement activity is evidence-based. The significant emphasis on development and improvement within the annual review and enhancement process, which informs the University's strategy and priorities for enhancement, is **good practice**.

4.7 The University's staff development programme is particularly effective in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching. There are a range of opportunities available to all staff including faculty-based learning and teaching days, a peer observation scheme, personalised development programmes and formal qualifications. The outcomes of these activities are regularly evaluated by the Learning and Teaching Committee for their effectiveness and impact on the student learning experience. Positive feedback from students, including through the National Student Survey, on the quality of teaching and academic support is a good indicator of the University's success in this area (see good practice under Expectation B3).

4.8 In addition to the regular structures for enhancement, the University has set up specific initiatives to make institution-wide improvements to the student learning experience. The most significant of these initiatives is the Communities of Practice, which were set up to engage the whole academic community in a structured and ongoing dialogue relating to learning and teaching. They support the enhancement framework by facilitating the identification and dissemination of good practice across the University and by providing opportunities for staff development in targeted discipline areas. Communities of practice are themed around a particular area and are open to academic staff, professional services staff, and those at partner organisations, and have recently been extended to students. Recent themes include enhancing assessment practice, educational technology and innovation in curriculum design. Staff whom the team met commented positively on their experiences of having participated in Communities of Practice, and the way in which they encourage open and constructive dialogue across the whole University, enabling sharing of good practice across subject disciplines. The Communities of Practice, which provide an effective platform for identifying, developing and sharing good practice to enhance learning and teaching, is **good practice**.

4.9 The review team concludes that the institutional approach to enhancement is strategic, well embedded and engages staff and students in a positive manner across the University. Through the numerous examples provided, the review team has confidence that the strategy for enhancement, particularly the embedding in quality assurance processes, is improving the quality of the student learning experience. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.11 There are no recommendations for improvement in this area.

4.12 The review team identified two features of good practice in this area. The first relates to the effective embedding of enhancement within the annual review and enhancement process. The second recognises the positive impact of the Communities of Practice as a vehicle for sharing good practice and shaping the University's enhancement agenda. The feature of good practice identified under Expectation B3, which recognises the University's provision of staff development to enhance learning and teaching, also makes a positive contribution to this area.

4.13 The University is committed to improving the quality of student learning opportunities, and it has been successful in embedding a culture of enhancement within the institution and its quality assurance processes. There are also established and effective University-wide mechanisms for identifying and sharing good practice across the University. Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The University recognises employability as an essential component of the student experience as set out in its Corporate Plan and the Strategy for Enhancing Student Employability 2014-16. The University has established a series of policies and initiatives to enable its graduates to succeed in a competitive global labour market.

5.2 The University's Employability Hub hosts weekly employer events and similarly the Business Gateway within the Business School works closely with external businesses and offers industry weeks, master classes and awards schemes. Local, national and international graduate recruiters are promoted through an e-bulletin sent out weekly. Students whom the team met provided examples of advice on careers provided through the Employability Hub, tutors, talks from practitioners, volunteering fairs and language courses. A Young Enterprise Scheme enables students to establish a business in their first year with their peers, supported by local businesses who give advice on finance, marketing and technology, as well as funding. This has included work with companies like Barclays Bank.

5.3 The Careers and Employability Team is central to embedding employability skills within the curriculum and provides tailored support and advice to academic teams. At the start of the new academic year the Head of Career Development and Employability meets with each faculty dean to discuss and agree the 'Outline of Faculty Based Career and Employability Skills Programme'. Subject Heads then organise the training programme (integrated within the subject timetable) with the relevant careers adviser allocated to their faculty. Careers planning sessions are also delivered as part of the subject curriculum and through extracurricular training events throughout the year. Staff whom the team met described a high level of student support for job applications and interview techniques.

5.4 Academic teams embed employability with reference to the curricular context as part of the approval process, and approval panels consider each curriculum against cross-sector expectations, Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements. Approval panels may include representation from the employment sector to ensure programmes are relevant and support employability.

5.5 The University also encourages students to undertake volunteering opportunities and its non-credit-bearing Service and Leadership Award recognises the value of such work. To support students to engage with study abroad, exchange and Erasmus opportunities, the University has established Global Hope and the students met by the team described a range of positive experiences.

5.6 In summary, students are provided with a high level of support and advice on careers and employability from many complementary sources within the University. The current focus is on embedding student employability within the curriculum. The success of the University's initiatives in this area is supported by improvements in the results of the DLHE survey.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30-33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx

Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

Good practice

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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